



# Alabama Touring Artist Program

## Study Guide 2013 Classical Dance Of India/Bharatanatyam Primary Artist: Sudha Raghuram Genre: Dance



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# **Alabama Touring Artist Program**

presented by the Alabama State Council on the Arts

This Study Guide has been prepared for you by the Alabama State Council on the Arts in collaboration with the performing artist. All vocabulary that is arts related is taken directly from the Alabama Course of Study, Arts Education. With an understanding that each teacher is limited to the amount of time that may be delegated to new ideas and subjects, this guide is both brief and designed in a way that we hope supports your school curriculum. We welcome feedback and questions, and will offer additional consulting on possible curriculum connections and unit designs should you desire this support. Please feel free to request further assistance and offer your questions and feedback. Hearing from educators helps to improve our programs for other schools and educators in the future.

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## **Set up**

Artists typically arrive 60 minutes before their scheduled performance in order to set up. Please have the space available to the artist as soon as she arrives.

All artists will need some kind of setup prior to arrival. Please communicate with the artist to discuss needs. Before arrival, please make sure floors are clean, and any electrical hook ups are in place for the artist. If she has asked to use your amplification system, please have it ready for a sound test as soon as the artist arrives. Please provide a staff person to assist the artist with set up.

## **Role of the Audience**

Although many students may not choose to pursue professional careers in the arts, many will choose to remain lifelong participants in, and learners of, the arts. A role that all students may play is that of an appreciative, responsive audience member. This role is one that has lifelong value to the learner as well as to the performer. Learning appropriate audience behavior is an integral component of all of the arts education areas. Positive audience qualities are part of the overall goal of *Achieving Excellence Through Arts Literacy*.

- Alabama Course of Study: Arts Education; 2006

Appropriate audience behavior includes sitting still and being very quiet during the performance. Audiences clap at the end of particular sections of the performance, or when they see something amazing that they want to tell the performer they really like. If a performer takes a bow, that is always a time to clap. You should not clap to music unless the performer asks you to. It is never appropriate to talk during a performance, unless in this instance the artist asks a question. We ask teachers and students to practice these rules of performance etiquette during the Alabama Touring Program productions.

## What to Expect:

Ms. Raghuram will perform a 45 minute lecture demonstration, which will include an introduction to Indian Classical Dance Forms and a description of Bharatanatyam. After discussing the role and purpose of the musical instruments, Ms. Raghuram will perform about five dances, each with a specific story. After her performance, she will ask students reflective questions. Students may wish to be prepared with their own questions for Ms. Raghuram.

## Historical Background:

Traditionally Indian Classical Dance was performed by Devadasis (a community of temple dancers) in the ancient temples. The Devadasis were women who dedicated their lives to serving the temple deity as dancers and musicians and their performances were an inherent part of the elaborate temple and court rituals.

The word Bharata in the word Bharatanatyam is a combination of three letters *Bha*, *Rha* and *Tha* in the language called Sanskrit. Sanskrit is the oldest language in India, similar to Latin in Europe. The letter Bha is Bhava which means emotions or feelings. Rha refers to raga which means tune or melody. Tha refers to Tala which means rhythm or beats. The word natyam means dance.

This classical dance of India (pronounced Bear-a-ta-na-tiem) will tell a story or describe the characteristics of people, animals, nature, and the gods by using hand gestures, facial expressions and rhythmic foot movements. The dance is performed to Carnatic music, the classical music of South India. It is similar to a solo dance drama.

The origin of Bharatanatyam dates back 2000 years. The ancient classical text for this dance is the 'Natyashastra'. Lord Shiva from Hindu mythology is considered to be the god of dance. Even today, in ancient stone temples in India, one can see the sculptures of Bharatanatyam dancers in different poses.

## Vocabulary

1. Hastas - These are formal hand positions that carry specific meanings, similar to sign language for the deaf. This is the primary way the dancer communicates to the audience.
2. Abinaya - communicating the different emotions through the use of the eyes, mouth, and neck movement. Emotions may include anger, happiness, fear, courage, sadness, wonder, peace etc.
3. Adavus - A sequence of steps in tune with the music.





#### 4. Costume:

- Saree - The Bharatanatyam costume made from 6 yards of cloth
- Jingles -Bells and anklets which are necessary for rhythm) The brass bells worn around the ankle are actually attached to a leather belt. Anklets are silver jewelry worn around the ankle. The Indian name for the bells is 'Gejje'.
- Accessories and jewelry - flowers are worn in the hair and jewelry is symbolic. For example the moon and sun may be worn on the head to symbolize beauty and grace descending on the dancer.

5. Make up - Elaborate facial makeup is necessary to enhance very important facial expressions. Red designs on the hands and feet are applied so that the hand gestures and foot movements are seen clearly.

6. Carnatic music - classical music of South India. The accompanying instruments are the Indian drum called mridangam, violin, cymbals and flute.

Websites you might visit (Be age appropriate. Check sites thoroughly):

1. [http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/bh/Bharata\\_Natyam](http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/bh/Bharata_Natyam)
2. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharata\\_Natya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharata_Natya)
3. [www.kalaikal.co](http://www.kalaikal.co)
4. [www.desicolors.com](http://www.desicolors.com)
5. <http://library.thinkquest.org/04oct/01260/elearn1.html>

Curriculum Connections:

1. Geography and culture: specifically India
2. Characteristics and details - science
3. Storytelling - emotional content, character and sequence; non-verbal communication

Suggested activities to do **before** the performance:

1. Find the location of India on a globe. Discuss how far away that is to the United States and imagine what it must have been like, long ago before we could travel on boats or airplanes. Think about this as an explanation as to how different the people in India are, and how their customs and art forms are different from ours. Talk about how important it is when we encounter something new, that we do not judge it by what we already know. For example, the facial expressions of an Indian dancer may read as very silly to us, because we do not use facial expressions like this. But remind students that to the Indian Classical dancer, facial expressions are very serious, although they may be playful at times. A good audience member will not laugh at another culture when it seems silly to us, but will try to understand the meaning of the new culture.
2. Identify and explain the features and characteristics of a snake. Tell the children there will be a dance about a snake in the performance. Have them guess what kind of dance might depict a snake. How would the dancer move?
3. Repeat this exercise with a discussion of the seasons. What are the characteristics of summer, spring, fall and winter? How might someone create a dance about the seasons?
4. This one could be lots of fun. Have the students research a peacock. Describe the look and behavior of the peacock. How does it move? Have the students write about the peacock describing it, it's behavior and how it moves. Then have the students relate the personality of a peacock to a person (personification). Write about a character that has a "peacock" personality.
5. Have the students tell a story about a loving mother helping her child learn how to behave well. Make sure they include all the emotions of the mother and the child as they tell the story. Break into pairs and act out the story without talking. How do you communicate an idea without using any words?

Activities to do **after** the performance:

1. Do some more research about India and the culture in India. Have students write about why they think people in India developed Indian Classical Dance. How does it relate to their history and culture? What do you know about the people of India by learning about the dance?
2. Create a dance about a snake in your own style that includes hand gestures, emotions and facial expressions. Choose some music that will

work for the dance and perform it for the rest of the class. Have the audience describe what they see?

3. If you had the students create a story about a person with a “Peacock” personality before the performance, now have them create a dance that tells that story. If the dance adds anything interesting, have them revise their stories to include more details from the dance.
4. Repeat this exercise with the story about the Mother and Child. Create a dance and write the story. Make sure all the details from the story are in the dance, and that all the details in the dance are in the story. Use the movement to help the students think of interesting action verbs.

### **Reflective Questions:**

1. Why do you think, we as artists, love visiting students and performing for them?
2. Why do we use hand gestures and facial expressions in Bharatanatyam?
3. How is this form of communication (hand gestures, facial expressions, stamping feet) similar to and different from the way we communicate daily with each other? Do you think people in India communicate like this all the time?
4. Why do you think we paint our hands and feet before we dance?
5. Why do you think we use dark eye-makeup?
6. What music may be used for Bharatanatyam dances?
7. Why do we wear a lot of jewelry, flowers and an elaborate dance costume?
8. Why do you think we always bend our knees while dancing? Do you think people in India always walk this way?
9. Why do we smile while dancing?
10. Do you think this dance could be performed in a group? What do you think that would look like? What would we have to do to make it work?
11. How long do you think it would take for a student to master this dance? Do you think it would be harder for a person living in the United States to learn this dance than someone living in India? Why? Why not?
12. Can you take up Bharatanatyam as a career?
13. How many of these movements, gestures or expressions can you remember and perform (or create your own):
  - a. Snake
  - b. Peacock
  - c. Thunder and Lightning
  - d. Blooming flowers in spring
  - e. A mother’s love